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PLATES AND ILLUSTRATIONS

Editorial

The Want of Confidence—The Victorian Period

TWO architects, a few days ago, were discussing the difficulties and the pleasurable experiences which they had with clients. Each had the same story to tell; one job would come in where the final sketches were accepted only after many consultations and many changes, and many more changes were made as the working drawings progressed, and, as the house proceeded, constant suggestions as to changes were made by the client, and repeated objections to the cost of the extra work were brought up. Such a job would be followed by another in which everything appeared to go smoothly; the sketches worked out to the client's satisfaction at once, the working drawings were mere enlargements of the sketches, properly figured and made ready for building, and during the progress of the work few changes were made, deductions on the part of the builder were accepted without hesitation, and extras at properly proportionate rates. Nor did there seem to be any way in which one could determine in advance which jobs were going to run smoothly and which jobs were going to be a source of constant trouble to both the owner and the architect.

The two men agreed that in practically all cases where the owner and the architect became involved in difficulties, the architect and builder, likewise, came to sword's points before the work was completed so that the "eternal triangle" bristled with its usual unpleasantness. The architects agreed that they worked no less faithfully, and with no less intelligence, for the troublesome clients than for those who made no trouble, and they agreed also that builders who continued to give satisfaction for "good" clients somehow did not seem to be of equal merit when they were working for "bad" ones.

One of the men finally put his finger on the solution. At that moment they were talking about a job where the builder, the architect, the sub-contractors, the draughtsmen and the mechanics all felt very sincere admiration toward the man for whom the work was being done, and each had similar pleasant instances to offer. "They trust you," said the first man. The real answer had been found. Probably nine-tenths of the difficulties in every piece of work from the smallest country house to the largest public building, arise from a lack of confidence on the part of the owner. Every architect has had jobs on

which the owner constantly consulted others than his architect, regarding technical questions, and even after taking the drawings home for a Sunday's study, has come back with numerous suggestions which evidently had been made to him by friends and pseudo-experts, whom he had consulted during that time.

Such a condition is incompatible with conscientious workmanship, either in the architect's office or on the part of the builder. The whole heart goes out of one's work when confidence is lost, and it is far better not to have a job, no matter how great the financial reward may be, where the attitude on the part of the client is one of questioning and hesitation.

Nobody should hire an architect he does not believe to be competent, and nobody should hire a builder he does not believe to be capable and honest. There remain overwhelming majorities in both classes from whom the proper services may be expected, and in whom an owner may place implicit confidence and trust.

There was a case where an architect specified a certain type of flooring in a building, and was informed by his client that this type of flooring was generally regarded as unsatisfactory, and he was requested to obtain from some of the more prominent men in his profession an expression of opinion as to the proper way of laying it. The architect inquired from the specification writers of several of the larger architectural firms, as to the practice in those offices, and was informed that his specifications covered the point. In spite of this fact the owner insisted that in a certain large building the floors had been put in in a different manner, and required that in the new building a similar specification should be followed. His wishes were regarded, and the floors now being unsatisfactory, he has turned to the architect for redress, believing his builder to be incompetent. The architect, of course, disclaims responsibility and exonerates the builder, but both the architect and the builder have left behind them a thoroughly dissatisfied client. The situation arose from the failure of confidence on the part of the owner. A man like this may pay his bills very promptly, he may have a work in hand which is interesting, and yet he may never be able to get satisfactory service from any architect, simply for the reason that constant nagging, petty irritations, explicit directions as to specifications and design, will result in an architect's making up his mind that there is only one thing to do, and that is to let the building go to the devil, if he can only keep the client half way satisfied by acceding to his wishes.

On the other hand a client who trusts his architect, inevitably gets the best that can be given him, and the architect does not limit his duties to those which he is actually paid to perform, but he is ready and anxious to be of service in the matters outside his province, and to spend time in assisting in the selections of furniture, hangings, draperies, wall paper, shrubbery, indeed anything that the client wants him to do.

In matters of construction, of design, and of color the architect and his draughtsmen will exercise every care which is in their power, to see that the thing is well done, and the difference in spirit with which draughtsmen work on a job where their work is seen and appreciated is noteworthy. It does not take long for the draughting room to know that an owner is fussy, suspicious and trying, and while probably all draughtsmen have even more of the artistic spirit which impels them to do things well than their employers, they work gladly and with interest on work which they feel to be worthy.

With contractors the case is not different; the owner who meets them with trust and confidence will rarely find that it has been misplaced; charges for extra work will be reduced to a minimum, since the contractor knows there is going to be no quibbling, no accusations of attempted extortion, no undue overhead in trying to reduce the irreducible, and the very mechanics on the job look forward to the visits of the owner with pleasure, when they know that there is to be no captious criticism of their workmanship, or of their speed, directed either to the builder or to the architect.

On public enterprises, members of the board of directors will frequently assume authority which belongs alone to the president, or to the building committee; they will strut about a building in course of construction, suggesting, even ordering, changes which they have neither the knowledge nor the power to make. In the case of one State Capitol, its architect says that the whole legislature, individually and as a body, made suggestions to him, and even passed laws regarding the method in which he should superintend, and the quality of the work he should accept, in disregard of the fact that the work was under contract to be done in certain specified ways.

Sometimes jobs which start out like this terminate very favorably for the architect. In the case of another State Capitol, the architect was regarded with such suspicion that an investigation into all his acts was ordered; happily a very careful and very competent committee was selected to perform the actual work of investigation, with a result that the suspicion was transformed into confidence, and the architect was entrusted beyond his contract with the supervision of the decorations and furnishing at a very much higher commission than he was paid on the first part of the building.

Similar results can sometimes be obtained with private individuals, and occasionally one will find an owner who, beginning with suspicions of the trustworthiness of both his architect and builder, will finish his work with the utmost confidence in the architect, and a belief that this man alone saved him from the clutches of the devouring contractor; sometimes the reverse is true, and the owner feels that only a loyal and competent contractor has saved him from the mistakes and errors of a stupid and foolish architect.

Neither of these results can be regarded as desirable, and the common charge made by owners that the builders and the architects are in collusion is very often true, except that the object of this collusion is too often misunderstood; the distrustful owner believes that they are endeavoring to work together to his harm while, most frequently, they are working together to save him from the consequences of his own stupidity.

Such cases loom large upon the architect's field of vision; they assume an entirely disproportionate aspect, and the man who has twenty jobs will rarely find that more than one or two of them come from clients of this kind, yet the kindness and friendliness of the eighteen or nineteen other clients will be half shrouded by the difficulties resulting from the one, although sometimes a client will be so appreciative that the architect will forget his other troubles in the pleasure of doing this one job.

We are, all of us, clients, architects and builders alike, prone to error, especially when dealing with a subject about which we know very little, and those of us who are architects and builders too frequently forget that a client knowing little about building construction, and having been successful in other lines of work, feels that he is competent to direct in this one, and we are most of us ready to accept his direction if it is sensible, or if he is open to reason when it is unwise. Further, if he can be induced to occasionally say a kind word when things please him, and to express his disapproval in a pleasant way, he would find that his complaints are no less regarded than when put in the bitterest terms, and that his relations with his architect would be improved and the entire building operations will show more satisfactory results.

IT is interesting to find that in the decorators' shops and in the shops where antique furniture is sold, that articles of the Victorian period are again coming into favor, and it is a pleasant and radical change of attitude in the public taste.

The Victorian period will probably always be regarded as a time when the general standards of design were lower than any other period in the world's history, and yet even at that time we find many articles of the allied arts and many pieces of painting and sculpture which were exceedingly good.

Likewise, there is a very considerable amount of early Victorian architecture of thoroughly good quality, although it generally passes unrecognized because of the general attitude of condemnation with which we are accustomed to regard all Victorian work. Just why the work of the Victorian period was so generally bad has always been a matter of discussion, following as it did upon a period when design in all the arts was carried to a very high degree of perfection. The contrast was so striking and the change so sudden that it has long puzzled the art critics and writers.

There are, however, two possible reasons for this change, which are perhaps sufficient to account for it. The first and more important of these is the fact that in the Victorian period machine workmanship became common. The fact that work is done by machine does not necessarily mean that the object itself is of poor design, but if the conscious efforts of all the world's craftsmen working by hand was to secure a further high degree of finish and a profusion of ornament, the design was to them secondary.

One can realize that when machine work came into general use, so that high degree of finish and a profusion of ornament was obtainable at the same expense as a plain and simple piece, the tendency of the manufacturers was naturally to produce articles of perfect finish and profuse ornamentation, rather than to study simplicity and design. The purchasing public, too, had probably, from the beginning of the world's markets, been educated to look for perfection and finish and neat mechanical execution. There can be no doubt that the present tendency to consciously produce rough textures would have seemed to our loyal ancestors and to good craftsmen of all previous times, the last thing in the world that was desirable.

It is, of course, impossible to us, and probably would be impossible to the men of the Victorian period, to ascertain the true causes of the complete change in methods of design, but the principal one seems to have been the desire for finish and ornamentation which they had been accustomed to look for in the highest class of article, and continued to look for in the manufactured article, without much regard for the design itself.

The second factor, and perhaps the less important one, which entered into the art of the Victorian period, was the fact that perhaps for the first time in the world's history, things began to be designed by people other than those who manufactured them. Of course, there were architects in the middle ages who had under them craftsmen, and there were also silversmiths who had working for them a number of journeymen, and yet we learn from the scanty annals of medieval times that a very large proportion of the detail was left to the imagination of the man who made it, and that in general the head of a workshop was more of a commission merchant than a designer.

Benvenuto Cellini, for example, speaks of having entered the employment of first one and then another "excellent master," and yet he always, in his memoirs, describes his work as having been designed and executed by himself. Work executed in this way naturally tended to continue in more or less fixed and narrow channels. The junior craftsmen learned from their seniors, and in turn transmitted their art. When with the tremendous increase in facilities of transportation in the Victorian period, designers began to travel and began to learn about the work of other periods, and of other countries, design became eclectic instead of traditional and inevitably suffered in quality, because of unfamiliarity with the motives which it sought to borrow.

Nevertheless, there were in the Victorian period practically as many good designers as there are today, and, in consequnce, we have remaining very many art objects of the Victorian period of sound worth; we are inclined to speak contemptuously of the brown-stone period of New York, and yet it may be stated with some conviction that there are probably remaining in New York today from 500 to 1,000 buildings of the Victorian period which are worth study and deserve admiration, and which pass entirely unnoticed because they are Victorian.

THE past decade has seen more changes and development in methods of building than any of the preceding ages, says S. M. Fechheimer, Editor Modern Building. All types of buildings—houses, offices, stores, factories, etc—show evidences of these modern improvements. What were considered "new-fangled" ideas yesterday have become necessities today. Questions of convenience, sanitation and comfort have become so important that it is almost literally true, as said by another, that "The good American mechanic would not be satisfied to live in one of the old-time castles, at least unless modern heating, lighting and plumbing were installed."

The average American accepts all these improvements as a matter of course and wonders at the high cost of building. He does not stop to consider that the modern tile bath room, for instance, which he now considers a necessity was the height of luxury a few years ago. Indeed, the owner today gets more for his money in the way of solid comfort and practical usefulness than he ever did in the old days, when labor and materials were cheap and partitions were uselessly built two feet thick.

Much less do persons realize one of the principal underlying causes for the rapid advance in building methods. Just as in the spread of knowledge generally, so here the development of the printing press has played an important part. But for the power of the press in spreading information quickly, we would be dwelling largely in the old style of buildings. In, our ignorance we would still be content with tin bath tubs, oil lamps, and stove heating. Everywhere—in the workshop and in the home—is seen the influence of publicity on building.

How else, except by publicity, would it have been possible to bring the advantages of reinforced concrete before builders? In less than a decade this construction has developed from a novelty to the standard fireproof construction. The leaders in this field did not hesitate to use the forces of publicity in their sincere efforts to place valuable information in the hands of architects, engineers, contractors and owners.

In the equipment of buildings, publicity has played the same important part. Manufacturers did not hesitate to use it to show improved methods in plumbing, heating, lighting, painting, etc. Think back in your own experience; was it not in the advertising pages where you received your first impressions in regard to many of the details you incorporated in your building?

Few of the public or of the building world realize the service which progressive manufacturers thus have rendered in influencing better methods of building. Courageously and unhesitatingly these men have borne the expense of important educational work, deriving for themselves only those incidental benefits that come from the use of better methods. It has taken men with big ideas to do work of this kind and it is no wonder that many of them have developed big organizations.

Y. M. C. A. Building, Greenwich, Conn.

M. L. & H. G. Emery, Architects

THE Young Men's Christian Association Building at Greenwich, Conn., was erected by Mrs. Rebecca Witherell as a memorial to her husband, the late Nathaniel Witherell, who was a prominent citizen of the town.

It was originally intended to express this memorial in a trade school which would provide a training for young mechanics, but in consideration of the fact that Greenwich is not a manufacturing town and its youth not likely to have inclinations or desires for such training, an institution would have very little use or value. The idea was, therefore, abandoned in favor of a Y. M. C. A. building.

For many years Mr. John A. Shedd, confidential manager of the Witherell estate, had been sponsor for and an interested patron of a Boys' Club and had permitted the use of an old building standing on a large plot of ground centrally located and owned by the estate. The new institution is really an enlargement of and a continuation of the Boys' Club and the building is planned to take care of three classes of members: boys, young men and older men. Trustees have been appointed, and the skeleton of an organization is complete.

The first drawings included a large auditorium for meetings of general public character, but this feature was eliminated on account of cost and by reason of the fact that the town was already amply provided with public auditoriums. The modified scheme was finally adopted in the spring of 1913.

The plan was determined by the formation and irregular grades of the plot, this being the primary problem. Its solution was found by dividing the structure into two wings, exactly alike, conforming with the street lines of the intersecting streets and connected at the angle by a circular pavilion surmounted by a dome and fronted with a circular colonnade. The colonnade joins the porticoes which mark the entrances to the two wings.

The design of the exterior is reminiscent of several interpretations of the Renaissance with a combination of smooth Harvard brick and light colored stone much used in the work of McKim, Mead & White. It is a style rather unusual for Y. M. C. A. buildings.

The architects aimed to make the interior homelike, warm and hospitable to the members or visitors. In the treatment of the necessarily large rooms they have succeeded in keeping a cheerful comfortable air which lacks nothing in dignity.

The generosity of the individual donor made possible the use of the best materials and the most modern devices of service and equipment. A free hand was given to the architects and the way made easy to attain desired effects.

In the planning of Y. M. C. A. buildings, the main point for consideration is the simplicity and convenience of control at a minimum of cost for the running expenses. There is continual conflict between the operators carrying on the work and the board of managers who cannot afford undue expenses for maintenance. Therefore, the thing to be sought for is a scheme that permits satisfactory oversight and conduct of the work by the smallest number of supervisors. In the Greenwich building, the administrative department occupies a central position where all activities can be easily controlled.

Where funds permit and the membership is large enough to support two distinct, fully equipped departments, the men's and the boys' departments are entirely separated, but in a small town building the more usual plan provides separate reading rooms, billiard rooms and class rooms. The gymnastic department, including bowling alleys, swimming pool and gymnasium, is for general use by all classes of membership at hours designated for such classes.

In the arrangement of this compromise scheme, no ideal plan has ever been presented. There is always the choice between two evils, between advantages or disadvantages. The best that one can do is to assist the centrally located administrative offices by giving doors and openings that allow free circulation and communication under systematic supervision of the secretaries in charge.

On the first floor in the angle is the trustees room or library. To the right and to the left in their respective wings are the reading rooms and billiard rooms. All of these rooms have beautiful terrazzo floors. They are finished in dark oak and furnished in keeping with the style. The ceilings are simple and appropriate. From the wings there are separate corridors entering the gymnasium, the locker rooms, the stairways to the bowling alleys and the swimming pool. The floors in this section are composition as well as the molded seats in the spectators gallery in the swimming pool. The elevated running track around the gymnasium is floored with cork tiling.

The treatment of the swimming pool was an effort to get away from the ordinary basement pool with glassy cold white walls that remind us of a morgue. A warm buff tile was used for the floor, and the walls were designed for the introduction of colored tile in pattern. The bottom of the pool itself is lined with large glass vault lights in combination with tile. The open space below the pool is wired for electricity and the water is to be lighted in an effort to do away with the dark forbidding aspect that strikes fear into the hearts of timid beginners. The gymnasium is generously equipped.

On the second floor are the class rooms, many of the larger rooms having folding partitions which make smaller units possible if needed for small groups of pupils. The lecture hall is located on this floor with seating capacity for 300.

The two upper floors are occupied by 38 bedrooms of sufficient size for double rooms, spacious closets and storage and plenty of bath rooms, showers, etc. The circular room is used as a lounge and smoking room.

All told, Greenwich has come into possession of a wonderful institution, without the usual struggle to get much for little money. The architects and donor have accomplished a very pleasing architectural result.